

# ABIDE

## DISCOVERING YOUR OLD TESTAMENT



### THE WEeping PROPHEt

#### *JEREMIAH AND LAMINATIONS*

As stated in the title, God's man Jeremiah has often been called the "Weeping Prophet" or the "Prophet of Midnight." The reason is because his message was one of extreme heartache. The job that God gave him was one that none of us would want, and in fact, Jeremiah didn't want it.

Jeremiah wrote his book in the 7th century, about 80 to 100 years after the book of Isaiah. What was terrible about what he had to do was that all of the predictions made by both he and Isaiah before him regarding all of the judgment God would bring about on His people, Jeremiah actually witnessed happen. Can you imagine predicting that your own countrymen would be brought down to their knees militarily and then watch that actual event take place?

Not only this, but God had told Jeremiah that while he preached, that no one would listen to him. Jeremiah prophesied for 40 years and to end off his ministry it is held that Jeremiah was stoned to death.

We learn also that Jeremiah was the son of a priest and that God called him to preach while he was relatively young in age. In Jeremiah 1 we find an account where God commissions this man and once this happens, Jeremiah answered God back in verse 6, "Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child." but we all know who won that little discussion.

We know also that Jeremiah was commissioned to preach to the kingdom Judah. If you remember, the northern kingdom (Israel) had already fallen, and now it was Judah's turn.

While watching all of these events unfold, Jeremiah was captured by Nebuchadnezzar during the initial siege, eventually released, and then taken away from his home once again and brought to Egypt.

From the time Jeremiah was very young, to the time of his death, we find that he had a life that would match the message he was called to preach.

Now let's take a closer look at this prophetic writing, and the corresponding book following it— Lamentation.

#### ***How to Think About Jeremiah***

Because this book is so focused on the death cry of Judah and surrounding nations, the way to break up this book is extremely easy to do.

**The Commission of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1):** This is where you learn a great deal of personal information about this prophet. As discussed in our introduction, this is where we discover information about Jeremiah's father being a priest, that he was young when he was called, and that he would be used as an instrument of God to announce God's judgment on God's people as well as other nations. God also tells Jeremiah to be bold as he spoke because there was not a force on the planet that would be able to stop him.

**The Condemnation of Judah (Jeremiah 2-45):** Here you have an extremely long pronouncement of judgment. You find Jeremiah's first sermon given, along with several other major headings— for instance, you'll find conflicts that Jeremiah has with leaders of the nation and false prophets, a specific telling of the fate of Israel, Judah, and Jerusalem, and a reiteration of the eminency of the fall of Jerusalem.

**The Coming Judgment Against the Gentiles (46-51):** In this section you will read of prophecies against the nations of Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, Elam, and Babylon.

**The Collapse of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 52):** It is here where you read of God's judgment finally being poured out on his people. In this chapter Jerusalem is captured and destroyed, and all of the people are taken captive and led away to Babylon.

### *What to Look for in Jeremiah*

An interesting feature to this work is that Jeremiah was obviously a very compelling preacher. He wasn't successful, but there was no doubt that he was understood. If you remember, Isaiah was the intellectual preacher. Well, in this book we learn that Jeremiah was the animated preacher. God used Jeremiah to speak vividly and graphically to His people.

### **Illustrations—**

**The Broken Cisterns:** In Jeremiah 2:13 Jeremiah says, "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." Here Jeremiah uses an image that was essential for doing business. You would not get through the day in this culture without either using a cistern or seeing one used. If you wanted to carry wine, many times you would use a cistern. If you wanted to transport water from the well, you would use a cistern. A cistern is a pot or a vase that can hold a liquid. And Jeremiah uses this imagery to tell the people that they were using a broken pot to try and hold God's living water. What do you think they would think about every time they had a cistern in their hand, or looked at one in their house?

**The Harvest is Past:** Here is another term these people would be very familiar with, found in Jeremiah 8:20, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." If you didn't have your crops at the right time, there was absolutely nothing that could be done as far as having food is concerned. What this illustration suggests is that the time for repentance is now officially over.

**The Marred Girdle:** Sometimes God had Jeremiah use visual pictures. In this case, God had Jeremiah take a "linen girdle", put it on, and then take it to the Euphrates and hide it in the dirt. Then, after a long time, God told Jeremiah, "Hey Jeremiah, do you remember that old belt I had you hide in the dirt? I want you to get it." And so Jeremiah does just that and he notices that it was gross and stained, and absolutely good for nothing. Then, God told Jeremiah, "Thus saith the LORD, after this manner will I mar the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem" (13:9).

**Yokes and Bonds:** In chapter 27 God told Jeremiah to make bonds and yokes and put them on his neck. Then he had Jeremiah show them to different kings and tell them that he had given their kingdoms into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.

### **Predictions—**

The test for one of God's prophets was not that His man be mostly right, but absolutely right. Otherwise, under penalty of law, death was to be carried out on that individual who claimed to speak for God but whose prediction was not 100% accurate. That said, Jeremiah made some stunning predictions. We will not take time to mention them all, but as you are reading, have this in mind when Jeremiah is speaking for God.

For example, in **25:11** we read, "And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years." Or **31:31** "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah."

### ***What to Gain from Jeremiah***

The book of Jeremiah is a dark tapestry of despair. You'll find the same is true in just a moment with a brief synopsis of Lamentation. These are really not the books you want to turn to to find a story of hope or encouragement. These are books to reverently look upon and heed the warnings of a people who could not be persuaded to follow God. However, as with every book that we have covered and every book we will yet cover, there are certainly teachings in this book that are worthy of our attention.

**God Has A Success Formula for His Servants:** Jeremiah's story looked like a loss on every front. He never married, he was rejected by the government and the people, he ended up under Babylonian rule, and he was thought to be a traitor. But during the time of Jesus, and as we see him now, we find a servant who was absolutely dedicated to the end. This tells us something very important: Don't look to success for a confirmation of God's mercy and blessing; look for faithfulness and integrity to God's Word instead.

If you think about it, Jeremiah's story actually has striking similarities to Jesus' story. If you remember, Jesus' ministry looked like it was going to be a failure. He never married, was rejected by the government and ultimately the people, He lived under Roman rule and died under the same. In fact, when Jesus asked His apostles "Whom do men say I the Son of Man am?" One of the answers given was the prophet Jeremiah (Matthew 16:13-14). There was a reason for that. God has a formula for success for His servants, but it never works the way the world works.

**God Has a Success Formula for the Nations:** This book is very much a warning to any nation who would decide to stand against God. As much as we want to believe it in America, God is no respecter of nations. He honors those who honor Him, and brings down those who dishonor Him. Everything in this book has to do with the national deterioration and disaster that comes from disobedience to God.

### ***Lamentations***

What follows in the book of Lamentations is a book of mourning. That is what Lamentation means— it is a book of Lament— of crying. It has been called the "Wailing Wall" book. Here Jeremiah is writing the official eulogy for the entire nation of Israel, but more specifically Jerusalem. The northern kingdom had been taken, and now the southern kingdom follows in the footsteps of death. If you were going to place the final words on a tombstone for a nation whose destruction came about because they would not listen to their God, this is what you would write.

The event actually takes place in Jeremiah 52. So what you have is that Jeremiah 52 records the history of the event, and Lamentation records the heart. To mention the heart here is to cause the resurfacing of how the heart is expressed in writing. In converting the poetical books, that is exactly what was explained— that the best way to express the emotion of the human heart was to write in poetry, and this is exactly what we find. Lamentation is a book of poetry.

## THE WEeping PROPHEt - JEREMIAH AND LAMENTATIONS

It consists of five poems written by Jeremiah and the purpose here is to express in the greatest and most grim detail how God's heart is broken over the fact that He had to finally judge His people.

This is an important truth to grasp. When one of God's people is in sin (or a group of people, or an entire nation), and is warned over and over again, God is not in heaven sitting there saying, "Just one more time! Disobey Me one more time, I dare you! I cannot wait to judge you!" No, He sends warnings to lovingly call to us. And the book of Lamentations is a book that tells us that when God does have to judge sin, He is not happy about it, it breaks His heart.

But even in the midst of destruction, by the time you make it to the middle of this book, in 3:18 you see these words, "And I said, My strength and my hope perished from the LORD:" then, you get to verse 21 which reads, "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope." And finally you get to verses 22-23, "It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions they fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."

Right in the middle of chaos and judgment, there is a declaration of hope. My friend, God can always bring hope in the dark night of judgment.

### *How to Think About Lamentations*

As for the layout of the book, our format will be a little different and the other two headings will not be covered here. However, a basic synopsis of each chapter will be given to help you navigate a reading of this text.

**Lament Number 1: Jerusalem is Destroyed**— In this section the city's greatness is remembered and there is a cry from Jeremiah knowing what God must do.

**Lament Number 2: God Cites His Explanation**— Here God explains His anger but also expresses that He is not excited in the least about this punishment.

**Lament Number 3: Jeremiah's Heart is Broken**— Once again we are brought to Jeremiah's sorrow, but the ultimate goodness of God is appealed to as Jeremiah cries out to the Lord.

**Lament Number 4: God Provides the Specifics**— In chapter 4 there rests the horrors of the now empty, silent city because of the sin and punishment suffered.

**Lament Number 5: A Faithful Few Offer Prayer**— God always has a remnant, and in this chapter there is a prayer for God to remember them and one of the final cries listed here is found in verse 21, "Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old."



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